

DOE plans unit to coordinate defense of US energy infrastructure

Maureen Lorenzetti
By the OGJ Online Staff

WASHINGTON, DC, Nov. 9, 2001 — The Department of Energy this week is expected to unveil a special unit within the agency that will coordinate homeland defense strategies for the nation's oil and gas sector, industry sources said Friday.

DOE officials were unavailable for comment.

Last month a group of 11 oil companies told Congress they planned to create a limited liability company to operate and manage an information-sharing and analysis center, under the agency's supervision (OGJ, Oct. 1, 2001, p. 22).

Electric companies already share information with each other under a 1998 arrangement between former Energy Sec. Bill Richardson and the North American Electric Reliability Council.

Global Integrity, a division of Predictive Systems Inc., Reston, Va., will operate the new energy center. Bobby R. Gillham, manager of global security for Conoco Inc., Houston, will serve as coordinator between industry, DOE, and various law enforcement agencies. Gillham was the point person for a June 2001 National Petroleum Council study on security threats to critical energy infrastructures. That report focused on cyber-terrorism but also addressed the physical security of pipelines, refineries, and other critical supply systems.

Companies participating in the newly-chartered Energy Information Sharing and Analysis Center are Anadarko Petroleum Corp., BP PLC, ChevronTexaco Corp., Conoco, Duke Energy Corp., El Paso Corp., Enron Corp. (to become Dynegy Inc.), Halliburton Co., Peoples Energy Corp., Phillips Petroleum Co., and Royal Dutch/Shell Group.

While policy makers are encouraged at industry's initial response, some US oil companies, such as ExxonMobil Corp., are notably absent from the roster. And organizers say that while participation is voluntary, strong industry participation is critical for success. One problem DOE is facing is that some companies are concerned that sharing information may make them liable to antitrust lawsuits.

But DOE and industry officials hope companies can be assured, either by DOE or by Congress, if necessary, that participation will not present legal liabilities.

Lawmakers are also aware of industry concerns. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) heard comments from industry representatives, including Gillham, at a closed hearing last month on the proposed center (OGJ Online, Oct. 1, 2001.) Bingaman also recently wrote 12 industry trade groups seeking input on further measures that the government could take to ensure the safety and reliability of energy and water delivery systems.

The congressional General Accounting Office first suggested that energy companies share security-related information as part of an interagency Year 2000 computer effort in the late 1990s.

Clarifying antitrust laws has bipartisan support in Congress and could be attached to either a spending bill or to broader energy legislation under consideration in Congress, congressional sources say.

Copyright © 2001 - PennWell Corporation and PennEnergy, Inc. All rights reserved.